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ABSTRACT

This presentation discusses student-to-student academic adjustment counseling, presently employed and initiated at Southwest Texas State University. Since available research results indicate the conventional pre-college orientation program is not meeting the academic adjustment needs of beginning freshmen, Southwest Texas designed a program utilizing a team of peer counselors and including the following essential elements: (1) formulation of meaningful peer counseling goals; (2) development of informed peer counseling support; (3) delineation of realistic peer counseling activities; (4) provision of adequate peer counseling facilities; (5) selection and training of peer counseling personnel; (6) coordination of peer counseling activities; and (7) evaluation and revision of peer counseling effort. Essential to its adoption on other college campuses are four essential characteristics: (1) it is economical in financial and personnel costs; (2) it is acceptable to both students and faculty; (3) it is effective in both study behavior and improvement in grade average; and (4) it is practical as regards necessary facilities and required supervision. (Author/TA)

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STUDENT-TO-STUDENT STUDY SKILLS COUNSELING AS AN EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE PROCEDURE

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In the United States, the counseling squeeze of higher education is already a fact. The explosive increase in student enrollment during the decade of the sixties, combined with limited resources available for counseling purposes, has placed a severe strain on the counseling services available at many colleges. However, the urgent requirement for more and better freshman counseling, as evidenced by the 30-40 per cent attrition rates reported for the freshman year, has not gone unrecognized by the trustees and administrators at our institutions of higher learning. They are beginning to realize that each early-leaver almost always represents a significant financial loss to their institution. Furthermore, they are coming to recognize that an effective counseling program is an important variable related to student retention, especially in view of the growing trend towards lowering the admissions requirements for disadvantaged students.

Kronovet states that 92 per cent of the 1,378 colleges and universities completing a 1966 questionnaire reported having some type of orientation program for their incoming freshmen. While varying in approach, content, and duration, most of these freshman orientation programs were provided during the week prior to the beginning of classes. After that, the incoming freshmen were usually left to their own resources in adjusting to the college community and to collegiate academic demands. However, about 15 per cent of the reported orientation programs consisted of a required course lasting a semester or longer, with students receiving

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credit for satisfactory completion of course requirements. Some colleges and universities are thus reversing the trend and expanding their freshman orientation activities from what used to be fairly simple, brief, and inexpensive efforts to what are now much more elaborate, extensive, and costly programs.

Although the widespread use of brief and simple orientation programs is slowly being replaced by more elaborate efforts, the results reported for most freshman orientatin activities suggests that a better definition of goals, contents, and procedures is badly needed. A systematic review of reports published during the past twenty years indicates that three major approaches to the freshman adjustment problem have been tried: (1) a pre-college orientation program consisting of between two and five days of briefings and conferences offered during the summer or during the week before classes begin, (2) a first-semester orientation course consisting of a series of regularly scheduled classes lasting for between six and thrity-six weeks, and(3) a program of group or individual counseling sessions offered to predicted low-achievers during their initial semester or to probationary students subsequent to their failing semester.

Published evaluations of pre-college freshman orientation programs indicate that there is little or no evidence to support the contention that such programs help incoming freshmen to relate themselves more effectively to the academic community. Data analyzed by Cole and Ivey clearly demonstrated that attendance at the pre-college orientation program offered at Colorado State University made little difference in student attitudes toward academic achievement or in their subsequent academic success. Foxley evaluated the pre-college orientation program at the University of Utah and concluded that, instead of being oriented to meet

specific program objectives, the participating freshmen were really being dis-oriented by the orientation experience. Furthermore, student responses to criterion instruments indicated that a "fun-and-games" type of orientation does not meet the academic and intellectual expectations and needs of incoming freshmen. Ivey reported essentially negative results for a three-year evaluation of the freshman week program at Bucknell University. Jesseph reported that students attending the pre-college orientation conferences at the University of Wyoming were not helped to improve their academic performance, although conference attendance was positively related to enrollment in study skills classes, use of the counseling center, and persistence in college attendance. These findings are in basic agreement with the results reported for Auburn University by Griffin and Donnan and for Kent State University by Pappas. Thus, the available research results indicate that the conventional pre-college orientation program is not meeting the academic adjustment needs of beginning freshmen, although most of the students do enjoy and approve of such pre-college activities.

Whereas the research findings are consistent in demonstrating the failure of most pre-college orientation programs, the available evidence concerning the value of required college orientation courses for first-semester freshmen is inconsistent and inconclusive. Entwisle surveyed the literature prior to 1960 and found eighteen reports evaluating the effectiveness of study-skills courses for college students. The research results indicated that some academic improvement usually followed a study-skills course, with the amount of improvement being positively related to the length of the course, the motivation of the students, and the emphasis given to supervised studying. Furthermore, all of the voluntary participation college-level courses reported substantial grade

improvement while the required participation courses for students on scholastic probation showed only slight improvement in academic performance. These conclusions are in essential agreement with those reported by Blake following a 1953 survey which revealed that about one out of ten colleges in the United States was requiring all freshmen to take a study-skills course.

Research reported since 1960 has largely confirmed the positive results obtained with voluntary-enrollment how-to-study courses and the lack of results for required-participation freshman orientation courses. For example, Rothman and Leonard, in a carefully designed investigation, found no significant differences in the mean grade-point averages, attrition rates, and value orientations for experimental students participating in a semester-long orientation course and control students receiving no orientation instruction. The available research results thus indicate freshman orientation courses to be of limited effectiveness except where student participation is voluntary and study-skills instruction is emphasized. The importance of both course content and student motivation is further confirmed by Berg and Rentel. They found that students who were motivated to improve and who voluntarily enrolled in a study-skills course did raise their grade-point averages, whereas students who were similarly motivated, but did not receive study-skills instruction, failed to make the same gains.

In recent years, numerous investigators have studied the effects of various group and individual counseling approaches upon the academic achievement of counselees. Of twenty-six studies reported during the past twenty years, only nine produced significant changes in academic performance. Investigators on seventeen college campuses reported little

or no success in improving the academic achievement of counselees experiencing scholastic difficulty. In fact, Goodstein reported that a five-year follow-up of counseling effectiveness with probationary students at the University of Iowa indicated the counseled group to have a greater percentage of students dismissed for academic failure while a comparison uncounseled group had a greater percentage of students who graduated.

By contrast, counseling programs on nine college campuses produced significant improvement in the academic performance of counselees. In all of the nine studies reporting success, student participation in the counseling program was on a voluntary basis. Comparison of the successful and unsuccessful counseling projects further suggests that, in addition to being somewhat longer in duration, the successful programs were characterized by a more client-centered approach and a more motivation-oriented content.

The results from over forty investigations reported during the past fifteen years thus suggest that a successful college orientation program should strive to incorporate the following characteristics--voluntary student participation, client-centered approach, motivation-oriented content, and study skills emphasis. The problem, of course, is how to provide such a program in view of the practical realities of our limited resources.

At most institutions of higher learning, the freshmen arriving on campus each fall are so numerous that it is virtually impossible for each to receive individual attention from personnel workers and faculty members. Because freshmen need immediate information and reassurance during the initial period of adjustment, college personnel programs are increasingly utilizing upperclassmen to assist in the early orientation of freshmen or to provide help in adapting to dormitory life. In fact, a recent survey of senior colleges and universities in the United States ~~completed by Brown and Zunker in 1963~~, revealed that approximately two out of three such institutions were employing student-counseling-student

procedures. However, the student counselor's job has too often ~~had usually~~ been concerned with the initial orientation ~~personal-social adjustment~~ of incoming freshmen, not with their subsequent academic adjustment. ~~adjustment to collegiate academic requirements.~~

At most colleges, the freshman must manage the required adjustment of study habits and attitudes on his own, for faculty members and personnel workers simply do not have the time to give individual attention to each new student. Freshmen do not, however, have to be without effective guidance in adjusting to new teaching methods and expanded study requirements. Since 1959, Southwest Texas State University has used a carefully selected, trained and supervised team of peer counselors to provide the needed assistance in adjusting to the academic demands of college. These student academic counselors work out of the Testing and Counseling ~~Guidance~~ Center, receive 40 clock hours of intensive counselor training, and are paid for their services on an hourly basis.

An eight-step screening process is employed in selecting these peer counselors. Scholastic ability, study orientation, academic history, peer acceptance, leadership experience, and conversational effectiveness are variables that are systematically evaluated during the selection process. The training of student academic counselors is accomplished through a 40-hour instructional program--approximately 30 clock hours of intensive training given during the spring plus another 10 hours of reviewing in the fall. The training program utilizes lectures, demonstrations, discussion periods, and practice exercises, as appropriate, to assure the acquisition of requisite knowledges and skills. Whenever possible, the "buddy system" is employed to permit experienced peer counselors to assist in the training of selectees.

Systematic academic adjustment counseling by peer counselors includes

three sequential guidance activities--survival orientation, test interpretation, and study skills instruction. The three student-to-student counseling activities provide six hours of academic adjustment guidance for each incoming freshman. All three guidance activities incorporate the following characteristics: (1) utilization of the peer approach in that the counseling is accomplished by carefully selected, trained and supervised upperclassmen; (2) utilization of the group approach in that the counseling is done in small discussion groups; (3) utilization of the motivation approach in that each freshman's study behavior and academic values are systematically surveyed; and (4) utilization of the prevention approach in that emphasis is given to identifying potential academic problems and planning appropriate corrective actions.

The objectives of the two-hour survival orientation session are to survey the major factors contributing to scholastic success and satisfaction, to summarize the differences between secondary school and college academic demands, to stimulate interest in developing effective study skills, and to report where and how students may obtain help with their problems. The objectives of the two-hour test interpretation session are to report the results of previously administered scholastic ability and achievement tests, to examine potential academic difficulties identified by the test results, to survey current study behavior and indentify deficient study skills, and to analyze present scholastic objectives and examine related motivational problems. The objectives of the two hours of study skills instruction are to identify a student's inefficient study procedures and to demonstrate effective study techniques to the student. Specifically, the counseling session is concentrated on efficient methods for reading textbooks, taking lecture notes, writing themes and reports, and preparing for and taking examinations.

A 25-minute sound filmstrip has been prepared to show the actual operation of our program of student-to-student academic adjustment counseling. The film is narrated by one of the student academic counselors employed by the Testing and Counseling Center at Southwest Texas State University. The audience is given a comprehensive description of all counseling activities and is taken through the four phases of the student-counseling-student sequence--survival orientation, test interpretation, study skills instruction, and study habits evaluation. This filmstrip, "Student-to-Student Counseling to Aid Academic Adjustment," will be shown at this time. Following the filmstrip showing, I will attempt to point out the advantages of student-to-student counseling and to delineate the essential elements of a successful program of peer counseling.

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The effectiveness of this student-to-student approach has been evaluated in order to assess its impact on study skills, academic attitudes and scholastic success. Experimental and control samples, each containing 108 men and 108 women, were selected from the population of full-time freshmen entering Southwest Texas State ~~College~~ University. Students in the control (uncounseled) sample were individually matched with those in the experimental (counseled) sample on sex, age, high school quarter rank, high school size, scholastic ability, and study orientation. Experimental subjects were organized into 54 counselee groups, with the four freshmen in each group being carefully matched on sex, scholastic ability, study orientation, and high school quarter rank. Six student academic counselors, three men and three women, were randomly assigned to counsel same-sex

counselee groups.

The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes and the Effective Study Test were employed to evaluate the program's effectiveness in communicating information about efficient study procedures. Table 1 reports the comparative test-retest differential for counseled and uncounseled freshmen on both measures of study behavior. On both instruments, the mean post-counseling score was significantly higher than the average pre-counseling score. Consequently, the data supported the conclusion that student academic counselors were successful in communicating meaningful information about effective study procedures.

The impact of academic adjustment counseling on subsequent scholastic achievement was assessed by employing the first semester point-hour grade ratio and quality-point total as criteria. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 2. Inspection of this table shows that counseled students earned semester grades averaging one-half letter grade and 8.3 quality points higher than those earned by matching uncounseled students. Consequently, the data supported the conclusion that student-to-student academic adjustment counseling produced significant improvement in the subsequent scholastic achievement of counseled freshmen.

Further indication of the effectiveness of the total freshman counseling effort at Southwest Texas State University is provided by a report on freshman to sophomore attrition rates prepared by the Texas Coordinating Board for Higher Education.* The reported attrition rate for the twenty-two state-supported senior colleges and universities in Texas averaged 36.5 per cent

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*As used in this report, attrition rate simply means the percentage of students classified as freshmen in one fall semester who were not classified as sophomores in the next succeeding fall semester.

for 1964-65, with all but one of the twenty-two institutions reporting a first year attrition rate greater than 25 per cent. The lone exception was Southwest Texas State University with an attrition rate of 15.6 per cent for the 1,462 freshmen enrolled in the fall semester of 1964.

It has been estimated that each college dropout represents a financial loss of about $1,000 to the typical state-supported institution. The freshman to sophomore attrition rate at Southwest Texas State University was approximately 20 per cent below the 1964-65 average for the twenty-two state supported senior colleges and universities in Texas. This 20 per cent difference thus represents 290 students retained at an approximate saving of $290,000. Of course, the student-to-student counseling effort cannot claim all the credit for the comparatively high retention rate at Southwest Texas State University. Still, the freshman to sophomore attrition rate was almost 35 per cent before the program became operational. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the student-counseling-student approach, backed up by the other freshman counseling services, did make a significant contribution to the 19 per cent drop in the freshman to sophomore attrition rate at Southwest Texas State University between the 1959-60 and 1964-65 academic years.

The student-counseling-student approach, developed at Southwest Texas State University, has subsequently been tried at a number of other colleges, primarily in Texas, with varying degrees of success. Since 1961, successful student-to-student counseling programs have been introduced at Texas Lutheran College, Arlington State College, Stephen F. Austin State College, Abilene Christian College, McMurry College, West Texas State University, St. Phillip's College, and Huston-Tillotson College. Unsuccessful programs were introduced and dropped at the University of Texas and at Houston Baptist College.

Inspection of these successful and unsuccessful programs clearly indicates that a successful program of student-to-student counseling cannot simply be "lifted" from one setting and installed intact at another location. Rather, the student-counseling-student approach must be carefully adapted to meet the student needs and local conditions prevailing on a specific college campus. Consequently, the following seven requirements are suggested as essential elements in a successful program of student-to-student counseling.

1. Formulation of meaningful peer counseling goals.
   The objectives for all peer counseling activities should be carefully spelled out in a manner that clearly recognizes student and institution needs, problems, and resources.
2. Development of informed peer counseling support.
   The student-counseling-student approach should be effectively sold in a manner that assures the appropriate support and involvement of administration, faculty, and students.
3. Delineation of realistic peer counseling activities.
   The guidance activities to be performed by student counselors should be carefully defined in order to make certain that selected guidance procedures and materials are appropriate to stated counseling objectives and to the student-counseling-student approach.
4. Provision of adequate peer counseling facilities.
   The peer counseling effort should be provided with adequate office and classroom space, properly equipped and centrally located, in order to

assure efficient program operation, effective program supervision, and manifest program recognition.

5. Selection and training of peer counseling personnel. All personnel, professional and student, directly involved in the peer counseling program should be carefully selected and given appropriate training in order to assure their understanding of the duties and responsibilities assigned to the student counselors and the potentialities and limitations inherent in the student-counseling-student approach.

6. ~~Supervision~~ Coordination of peer counseling activities. The ongoing program of student-counseling-student activities should be ~~continually supervised~~ directed by professional guidance personnel in order to assure efficient, realistic, and coordinated program operation.

7. Evaluation and revision of peer counseling effort. All aspects of the peer counseling program should be evaluated systematically and the individual counseling activities should be eliminated, revised, or expanded, as appropriate, on the basis of their proven effectiveness.

The program of academic adjustment guidance through student-to-student counseling possesses four characteristics essential to its adoption on other college campuses. First, it is economical in terms of both financial and personnel costs. Second, it is acceptable in terms of both student and faculty approval. Third, it is effective in terms of both study behavior

and grade average improvement. Finally, it is practical in terms of both necessary facilities and required supervision.

It must be recognized, of course, that each institution has its own unique set of characteristics and that the student-counseling-student approach described today is generalizable to another campus only to the extent that its institutional press is similar to that of Southwest Texas State University. For example, the [redacted] size of the institution is a significant factor that must be taken into account. The larger the university, the more complex the organizational structure, the more diluted the administrative control over student behavior, and the more ~~divided~~ diverse the sources of influence affecting students. Whereas a program of student-to-student counseling can be readily operated out of the counseling center in a small college, such a program might better be located in the various residence halls or colleges within a large university. Decisions concerning the proper location of the program, as well as those concerning program objectives and contents, must be decided on the basis of carefully defined local needs. The unique characteristics of each institution--educational purpose, organizational structure, learning climate, student subculture--must be carefully considered while planning a student-to-student counseling program. To that end, it would be highly desirable for student leaders to be included in such planning from the beginning.

The proper reimbursement of student counselors is another point to be considered. In all but one of the student-to-student projects with which I have been associated, the student counselors undertook their duties as an added activity performed for financial reimbursement. Observation indicates, however, that even the most able of our undergraduates is frequently kept racing to stay caught up with the academic demands imposed by our tension-producing institutions of higher learning. Why not set up the program in a course context and give academic credit to the student counselors in recognition of their training and counseling activities? Such course-connected

apprenticeships are common at the graduate level, so why not offer a practicum experience for undergraduate student counselors? One institution, Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas, has already done so with positive results. The student counselors in their program receive three semester hours of elective college credit for each year's service as a student counselor. The course, which is offered only to secondary education students, is jointly conducted by the education department and the counseling center. Everyone connected with the program--administrators, faculty members, and students--have affirmed the positive value of such apprenticeship experience for students enrolled in a teacher training program.

Although ~~operational economy and~~ counseling effectiveness is certainly an important evaluation criterion, perhaps a more significant consideration is the personal commitment and involvement of the students who counsel. In this period when students are questioning the relevance of their learning experiences and are pressing for meaningful involvement in campus affairs, the student-counseling-student approach may offer an apprentice-like activity which provides a satisfying outlet for service motives while giving an added dimension to the student's preparation for future careers, ~~in teaching, social work, government service or whatever.~~

Evidence as to the student counselor's sense of commitment and involvement is afforded by a follow-up of the student academic counselors employed by the Testing and Counseling Center at Southwest Texas State University during the 1959-60 through 1965-66 academic years. Of the seventy-four students employed as counselors during this seven year period, twenty-nine, or 39.2 per cent, decided to become professional counselors and have subsequently received their master's degree and/or counseling certificate. Only one of the twenty-nine students had considered entering the counseling profession prior to their employment as student academic counselors. Furthermore, all but four of the remaining forty-five student academic counselors subsequently became school teachers or college instructors and ~~elementary or secondary school teachers and~~

all of them have credited their employment as student academic counselors with providing training and experience that helped and inspired them to enter their chosen profession.

Recently published reports indicate that the student-counseling-student approach has been successfully adapted to other areas of campus life. For example, Waits reports an innovative peer counseling program introduced at Los Angeles City College in an effort to diagnose and deal with the special problems faced by ghetto students recruited into college from inner city high schools where college preparatory instruction is not offered. In addition to counseling these students about their special adjustment problems, the student counselors also try to identify sources of student dissatisfaction with the college curriculum and operation. The student counselors then report on these potential problem areas to appropriate college administrators.

In yet another example, a completely student-run and student-staffed Advising Office was recently introduced by the School of Education at the University of Michigan. The stated purposes of this guidance service are to provide supplemental advising by experienced peers who have completed various program requirements such as directed teaching and to provide a place where students can talk informally about their aspirations and try to relate these to their selected program of studies.

Upcraft recently reported a successful program involving the use of upperclassmen students to provide academic advisement for freshmen. In this program, the student counselor's role was the same as the typical faculty advisor in Justin Morrill College at Michigan State University. They had complete freedom to recommend courses and instructors. They helped students with the administrative complexities of enrollment and scheduling. They kept and used the academic files for freshmen. They advised students who were in academic difficulty or referred them to someone who could help them. They were available for informal personal

counseling and as a source of general information about the college. They served as a vital communication link between the freshmen and the student relations office. Program evaluation made by both faculty and students indicates that the student counselors handled their assigned responsibilities in an efficient and effective manner.

Many other examples may be found in the recent issues of educational and psychological journals. Haslam and I recently reported the successful use of student-to-student study skills counseling in an Upward Bound Project. Wharton, McKeen, and Knights have reported the effective use of student assistants for faculty advisors at Allegheny College. Wolff has reported the effective use of undergraduates as campus mental health workers at the University of Rochester.

Despite the potentialities inherent in peer counseling, many college administrators will undoubtedly be opposed or apathetic to the expanded use of student-counseling-student procedures. They will point out that the approach is potentially dangerous because student counselors receive only limited training and may not recognize the point at which a problem exceeds their capabilities. Although such concern in not without justification, fully tested operational procedures are available to minimize the danger. Furthermore, the same dangers exist whenever faculty members are assigned counseling responsibilities.

In the final analysis, the student-counseling-student approach is best judged by the results that have been obtained. Students receiving peer counseling out-performed students not receiving such counseling by quite substantial margins. Comparison test-retest scores for counseled students showed significant improvement in measured study skills and academic attitudes. Grade-point averages for counseled students were significantly higher than those reported for uncounseled students. The research results are consistent in suggesting that the use of carefully selected, trained, and supervised student counselors provides a meaningful and effective alternative to the largely unproductive college preparation and orientation

programs now being offered by so many of our colleges and universities.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that all too few colleges provide students an opportunity to truly identify with the academic program in a meaningful way. In his study of college influence upon student character, Eddy concluded that the colleges which were most effective in reaching their students were those which afforded opportunity for (1) involvement of students, (2) participation of students, (3) critical thinking of students, and (4) commitment of students. The program of student-to-student academic adjustment counseling, as described today, does most definitely make provision for all four. Furthermore, this type of student involvement activity reflects positive, constructive behavior rather than the negative, destructive behavior that characterizes so much of the recent campus unrest accompanying student involvenent efforts.

Table 1

COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE OF MATCHED EXPERIMENTAL (COUNSELED) AND CONTROL (UNCOUNSELED) SAMPLES ON TWO IMMEDIATE CRITERIA OF COUNSELING EFFECTIVENESS
(Southwest Texas State College, San Marcos, Texas)

			Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes		Effective Study Test	
Group	Sex	N	Test	Retest	Test	Retest
Counseled	Male	108	102.8	134.1*	94.3	104.6*
Uncounseled	Male	108	104.0	101.8	93.8	93.5
Counseled	Female	108	115.6	143.8*	98.8	111.4*
Uncounseled	Female	108	116.3	113.8	99.2	97.9

Test-retest interval was 12 weeks for both instruments.

*Counseled freshmen scored significantly higher than matching uncounseled freshmen on retest ($P=<.01$).

Table 2

COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE OF MATCHED EXPERIMENTAL (COUNSELED) AND CONTROL (UNCOUNSELED) SAMPLES ON TWO DELAYED CRITERIA OF COUNSELING EFFECTIVENESS
(Southwest Texas State College, San Marcos, Texas)

Group	Sex	N	Point-Hour Grade Average	Quality Point Total
Counseled	Male	108	2.27*	21.2*
Uncounseled	Male	108	1.88	14.8
Counseled	Female	108	2.69*	28.0*
Uncounseled	Female	108	2.06	17.7

*Counseled freshmen earned significantly higher grades than did matching uncounseled freshmen ($P=<.01$).